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ABSTRACT

This position statement from the Conference on College Composition and Communication begins with a "foundation claim": in all situations calling for writing assessment, the primary purpose of the specific assessment should govern its design, implementation, and the generation and dissemination of its results. It describes 10 assumptions about writing assessment, including language is by definition social, writing ability is a sum of a variety of skills, assessment tends to drive pedagogy, and the means to test students' writing ability shapes what they consider writing to be. It lists 5 rights and responsibilities of students; 8 rights and responsibilities of faculty; 6 rights and responsibilities of administrators and higher education governing boards; and 3 rights and responsibilities of legislators. It concludes that, when conducted sensitively and purposefully, assessment can have a positive impact on teaching, learning, curricular design, and student attitudes. (RS)

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teaching and assessing writing and how they relate to their particular environment and to already established programs and procedures, understanding that generally student learning is best demonstrated by performances assessed over time and sponsored by all faculty members, not just those in English;

2. announce to stakeholders the purposes of all assessments, the results to be obtained, and the ways that results will be used;
3. assure that the assessments serve the needs of students, not just the needs of an institution, and that resources for necessary courses linked to the assessments are therefore available before the assessments are mandated;
4. assure opportunities for teachers to come together to discuss all aspects of assessments: the design of the instrument; the standards to be employed; the interpretation of the results; possible changes in curriculum suggested by the process and results;
5. assure that all decisions are made by more than one reader; and
6. should never use any assessment results as the primary basis for evaluating the performance of or rewards due a teacher; they should recognize that student learning is influenced by many factors such as cognitive development, personality type, personal motivation, physical and psychological health, emotional upheavals, socioeconomic background, family successes and difficulties which are neither taught in the classroom nor appropriately measured by writing assessment.

Legislators should:

1. never mandate a specific instrument (test) for use in any assessment; although they may choose to answer their responsibility to the public by mandating assessment in general or at specific points in student careers, they should allow professional educators to choose the types and ranges of assessments that reflect the educational goals of their curricula and the nature of the student populations they serve;
2. understand that mandating assessments also means providing funding to underwrite those assessments, including resources to assist students and to bring teachers together to design and implement assessments, to review curriculum, and to amend the assessment and/or curriculum when necessary;
3. educate themselves, and consult with rhetoricians and composition specialists engaged in teaching, about the most recent research on the teaching of writing and assessment;
4. understand that different purposes require different assessments and that qualitative forms of assessment can be more powerful and meaningful for some purposes than quantitative measures are, and that assessment is a means to help students learn better, not a way of unfairly comparing student populations, teachers, or schools;
5. invite teachers to help with the drafting of legislation concerning assessments; and
6. recognize that legislation needs to be reviewed continually for possible improvement in light of actual results and ongoing developments in writing assessment theory and research.

Assessment of Writing

When conducted sensitively and purposefully, assessment can have a positive impact on teaching, learning, curricular design, and student attitudes.

Assessment of written literacy should: be designed and evaluated by instructors of the students being assessed, for purposes clearly understood by all the participants; elicit from student writers a variety of pieces, preferably over a period of time; encourage and reinforce good teaching practices; and be solidly grounded in the latest research on language learning.

Students who take pleasure and pride in using written language effectively are increasingly valuable in a world in which communication across space and a variety of cultures has become routine.

Writing assessment that alienates students from writing is counterproductive and writing assessment that fails to take an accurate and valid measure of their writing even more so. But writing assessment that encourages students to improve their facility with the written word, to appreciate their power with that word and the responsibilities that accompany such power, and that salutes students' achievements as well as guides them, can serve as a crucially important educational force.

The full text of this position statement is available at ***http://www.ncte.org/ccc*** or **CCC, *October 1995.* For additional copies of this brochure (Stock #58730), write to NCTE Order Dept., 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096 or call 217-328-3870.**

ASSESSMENT

A Position Statement

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Conference on College Composition and Communication
1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096

Within the field of composition studies, writing assessment evokes strong passions. It can be used for a variety of appropriate purposes but writing assessment can be abused as well.

We begin our position statement therefore, with a foundational claim upon which all else is built: *in all situations calling for writing assessment, the primary purpose of the specific assessment should govern its design, its implementation, and the generation and dissemination of its results.*

ASSUMPTIONS

All writing assessment—and thus all policy statements about writing assessment—make assumptions about the nature of what is being assessed. Our assumptions include the following:

FIRST, ***language is always learned and used most effectively in environments where it accomplishes something the user wants to accomplish for particular listeners or readers within that environment.*** The assessment of written literacy must strive to set up writing tasks appropriate to and appealing to the particular students being tested. Accordingly, there is no test which can be used in all environments for all purposes.

SECOND, ***language by definition is social.*** Assessment which isolates students and forbids discussion and feedback conflicts with current research about language use and the benefits of social interaction during the writing process.

THIRD, ***reading—and thus, evaluation, since it is a variety of reading—is as socially contextualized as all other forms of language use.*** What any reader draws out of a particular text and uses as a basis of evaluation depends on how that reader's language use has been shaped.

FOURTH, ***any individual's writing "ability" is a sum of a variety of skills employed in a diversity of contexts, and individual ability fluctuates unevenly among these varieties.*** Consequently, one piece of writing—even if it is generated under the most desirable conditions—can never serve as an indicator of overall literacy.

FIFTH, ***assessment is defensible primarily as a means of improvement of learning.*** Both teachers and students must have access to the results in order to be

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able to use them to revise existing curricula and/or plan programs for individual students.

SIXTH, ***assessment tends to drive pedagogy.*** Assessment thus must demonstrate "systemic validity"; it must encourage classroom practices that research and practice have demonstrated to be effective ways of teaching writing and of becoming a writer.

SEVENTH, ***standardized tests, usually developed by large testing organizations, tend to misrepresent disproportionately the skills and abilities of students of color.*** This imbalance tends to decrease when tests are directly related to specific contexts and purposes.

EIGHTH, ***the means used to test students' writing ability shapes what they, too, consider writing to be.*** If students are asked to produce "good" writing within a given period of time, they often conclude that all good writing is generated within those constraints.

NINTH, ***financial resources available for designing and implementing assessment instruments should be used to do that and not to pay for assessment instruments outside the context within which they are used.***

TENTH, and finally, ***there is a large and growing body of research on language learning, language use, and language assessment that must be used to improve assessment on a systematic and regular basis.*** Assessment programs must always be under review and subject to change by well-informed faculty, administrators, and legislators.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Students should:

1. be informed about the purposes of the assessment they are writing for, the ways the results will be used, and avenues of appeal;
2. demonstrate their accomplishment and/or development in writing by means of composing, preferably in more than one sample written on more than one occasion, with sufficient time to plan, draft, rewrite or revise, and proofread each product or performance;
3. write on prompts developed from the curriculum and grounded in "real-world" practice;
4. have their writing evaluated by more than one reader, particularly in "high stakes" situations (e.g., involving major institutional consequences such as getting credit for a course, moving from one context to another, or graduating from college); and
5. receive response, from readers, intended to help them improve as writers attempting to reach multiple kinds of audiences.

Faculty should:

1. play key roles in the design of writing assessments, including creating writing tasks and scoring guides, for which they should receive support in honoraria and/or release time; and should appreciate and be responsive to the idea that assessment tasks and procedures must be sensitive to cultural, racial, class, and gender differences, and to disabilities, and must be valid for and not penalize any group of students;
2. participate in the readings and evaluations of student work, supported by honoraria and/or release time;
3. assure that assessment is "authentic"; i.e., it measures and supports what is taught in the classroom;
4. should make themselves aware of the difficulty of constructing fair and motivating prompts for writing, the need for field testing and revising of prompts, the range of appropriate and inappropriate uses of various kinds of writing assessments, and the norming, reliability, and validity standards employed by internal and external test-makers, as well as share their understanding of these issues with administrators and legislators;
5. help students to prepare for writing assessments and to interpret assessment results;
6. use results from writing assessments to review and (when necessary) to revise curriculum;
7. encourage policy makers to take a more qualitative view toward assessment, encouraging the use of multiple measures, infrequent large-scale assessment, and large-scale assessment by sampling of a population rather than by individual work whenever appropriate; and
8. continue conducting research on writing assessment, particularly as it is used to help students learn and to understand what they have achieved.

Administrators and Higher Education Governing Boards should:

1. educate themselves and consult with rhetoricians and composition specialists teaching at their own institutions, about the most recent research on

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